

# The U.S. Joint Task Force Experience in Liberia

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**D**URING THE SUMMER and early fall of 2003, U.S. military forces conducted stability operations and support operations (SOSO) in Liberia to help prevent an impending humanitarian disaster. Conducted in an uncertain security environment, this joint and combined operation involved U.S. land, air, sea, and special operations forces (SOF) and the military forces of eight West African countries. This is the story of how a relatively small U.S. force using reachback technology and intensive interagency coordination helped an untried West African force secure the Liberian capital of Monrovia for the resumption of humanitarian operations.

In July 2003, Liberia was in the death throes of a 23-year civil war. Under attack on two fronts, Liberian President Charles Taylor's government forces prepared for the final defense of the capital. Desperate for security and food, thousands of Liberian civilians flocked to camps established for "internally displaced persons." In addition to the obvious need to prevent human suffering, the United States wanted to reduce the risk of Liberia becoming a source of regional instability. However, it was critically important that the United States not be drawn into a mission of unlimited duration while demonstrating its support for the Liberia peace process, because the U.S. military was already stretched thin because of the Global War on Terrorism. The U.S. military presence in Liberia was an economy of force operation.

## The Liberian Crisis

Liberia was established by freed American slaves in 1847. Although it had once been a prosperous nation, it began to spiral downward after Samuel Doe's bloody coup in 1980. Charles Taylor, the charismatic but corrupt president of Liberia, came to power in a questionable election in 1997. Under UN indictment for alleged war crimes in Sierra Leone, Tay-

lor was preoccupied with his own war against two rebel factions: Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL).

Through the first half of 2003, short but violent engagements characterized the fighting between rebel and government forces. Roving bands of armed fighters, many high on drugs, preyed on defenseless civilians. Both sides employed thousands of child soldiers. The collapse of security in Monrovia forced the UN and other humanitarian organizations to leave the country. By late July, thousands of frightened civilians streamed toward the capital in search of food and safety.

In March 2003, U.S. European Command (EUCOM) began intensely monitoring the situation in Liberia. With the situation continuing to deteriorate, EUCOM dispatched a survey and assessment team and a U.S. Navy SEAL platoon to Monrovia. In early July, EUCOM bolstered embassy security with a Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team Platoon. EUCOM also deployed a humanitarian and assistance survey team to determine the extent of the humanitarian crisis. In mid-July, EUCOM prepositioned the 398th Air Expeditionary Group in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and Dakar, Senegal. EUCOM also placed SOF in neighboring countries, in preparation for a possible noncombatant evacuation of U.S. citizens.

On 17 July, the U.S. Army Southern European Task Force (SETAF) (Airborne), under the command of Major General Thomas R. Turner, received warning orders from EUCOM and U.S. Army Europe to establish a joint task force (JTF) by 25 July. Organized and manned as the core of a JTF headquarters, the task force's practiced JTF procedures, and the reachback capabilities of its command and control (C2) facility near Vicenza, Italy, made it well suited to lead the military effort in Liberia.

Manning proved to be one of the most challenging aspects of forming the JTF. SETAF used EUCOM Directive 55-11, "Joint Task Force Headquarters, Policies, Procedures and Organization," as the base document for building the Joint Manning Document (JMD). However, delays in filling the EUCOM-validated JMD affected the initial planning effort. Fortunately, the warning order to establish the JTF came just as SETAF was conducting its annual staff certification for newly arrived personnel. Exercise participants and trainers from the Army's Battle Command Training Program at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, were already on hand and proved to be a fortuitous initial augmentation of the JTF staff.

### Mission Analysis

From a U.S. policy perspective, a regional African force was best suited to provide short- and long-term solutions in Liberia. JTF planners understood that U.S. forces would play an enabling role in support of a West African force with minimal U.S. boots on the ground. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional entity with political, economic, and military dimensions, provided the African force.

The ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) had intervened in an earlier Liberian civil war during the 1990s with several negative consequences. Determined to overcome the stigma of ECOMOG, ECOWAS leaders selected Nigerian Brigadier General Festus Okonkwo to lead the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL). In 1997, Okonkwo had served as a battalion commander during the ill-fated ECOMOG mission and was keenly aware of the need for ECOMIL to perform well. Okonkwo and many of his subordinate leaders in the ECOMIL force had trained in U.S. Army schools. They were professional, competent, experienced commanders, and most spoke English.

In contrast, the warring factions were ragtag organizations. LURD and MODEL had precarious leadership, no reliable logistical support, and their forces tended to culminate quickly. Government forces loyal to Taylor, while better organized, suffered from low morale and a sense that the end of the Taylor era was near. Like their rebel enemies, they frequently engaged in wholesale looting in an effort to strip the country of all they could before Liberia collapsed into a failed state.

Given the nature of humanitarian operations and Liberia's operational environment, JTF planners knew mission success would be predicated on a

strong interagency effort. The sheer scope of the problem in Monrovia alone required close coordination with the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, and the UN.

Understanding the agendas of the various stakeholders in Liberia would be key to a successful interagency effort. As the commander of an enabling force, the JTF commander would be required to lead by persuasion. The UN's immediate goal was to secure Monrovia for humanitarian relief. The larger goal was to build a peacekeeping force to eventually secure all of Liberia. Several humanitarian officials made public statements that underscored their desire for greater U.S. diplomatic, economic, and military involvement. Some made statements that belied their lack of faith in ECOMIL.

The daily worsening of the humanitarian situation in Liberia, and the subsequent international pressure on U.S. President George W. Bush's Administration to do something decisive, generated a requirement for U.S. military forces to deploy quickly and participate directly in the operation. Despite the need for a rapid U.S. response, it was important for the JTF commander to minimize the number of U.S. boots on the ground. Political considerations dictated that U.S. forces could not be the mission lead.

Accordingly, the JTF determined deploying ECOMIL forces was the operational center of gravity. The JTF would need to play a central role in assessing the readiness of ECOMIL forces, equipping them as necessary and facilitating the deployment of the vanguard and remaining forces. Without a timely deployment in sufficient numbers to achieve the immediate security objectives, thousands of Liberian civilians would be at risk. An additional consideration was that the ECOMIL force would be the advance guard of an eventual 15,000-strong UN force. A slow or unsuccessful deployment would hinder the UN's effort to solicit troops for the follow-on force.

After a detailed mission analysis, the JTF produced a concise mission statement: "When directed, JTF Liberia deploys to provide support to ECOWAS forces' stability operations in [the] vicinity of Monrovia, Liberia, in order to mitigate a humanitarian crisis and set conditions for introduction of a follow-on, UN-led international peacekeeping force." As planning progressed, the JTF commander's intent clearly defined the key tasks and the end-state conditions necessary for mission accomplishment. Key tasks included—

- Echeloning the deployment of JTF headquarters C2.



A Special Operations security team member observes a UN helicopter approaching the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia.

- ▣ Assessing, equipping, training, and deploying ECOWAS forces; providing intelligence support and logistical sustainment to ECOWAS.

- ▣ Providing a quick response force (QRF).
- ▣ Conducting information operations (IO).
- ▣ Protecting the force.

End-state conditions desired were for—

- ▣ Monrovia to have a stable infrastructure in place to enable resumption of humanitarian assistance by humanitarian organizations.

- ▣ ECOMIL to transition to a UN-led force.
- ▣ The JTF to redeploy and stand down.
- ▣ A transitional government to be in place in Liberia.

The mission statement and commander's intent were critical to the JTF's future efforts to ward off mission creep. With the EUCOM commander and joint staff's early approval of the mission statement and commander's intent, the JTF commander had a solid anchor point that clearly defined mission parameters and the end state. As the mission played out, the JTF frequently came under pressure to expand its mission; the mission and intent paragraphs served as the JTF's consistent azimuth to achieving U.S. military objectives without inordinately expanding the scope of the U.S. commitment.

## A Joint Solution

In addition to SETAF headquarters, the JTF had been allocated ground, air, sea, and special operations forces. Commanded by Captain David Taylor, the Navy's three-ship Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group provided the platform for the embarked 26th

Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) and other operational capabilities. The MEU, commanded by Colonel Andy Frick, consisted of about 2,200 Marines, 24 fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, and ground combat and support vehicles.

The 3d U.S. Air Force (USAF), under Major General Michael Wooley, served as the USAF component for the duration of JTF operations. The 3d Air Force's 398th Air Expeditionary Group, based in Iceland, deployed to Freetown and Dakar in

late June to provide noncombatant evacuation operations and other capabilities. It served as the USAF component's forward headquarters element during the operation.

Teams from the Army's 1st Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), deployed to eight ECOWAS countries between 23 July and 11 September to conduct baseline assessments of forces slated for peacekeeping duty in Liberia. U.S. Army Europe's 21st theater support command had an on-call mission to provide logistical support should the commercial firm the U.S. Department of State contracted with to provide support was unable to fulfill its commitments in this dangerous and austere environment.

In late July the JTF established a seven-member forward coordination element at the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia. Working with John Blaney, the U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, and his country team, the forward coordination element provided a critical link in coordinating the JTF's operations with the Embassy, the UN, and other humanitarian organizations in Monrovia.

At the national level, the U.S. Embassy and Department of State worked to secure international support for the ECOMIL force. In the early stages, the Department of State provided a \$10 million contract to provide contract air and sealift, communications, and other support.

To facilitate coordination with ECOMIL, the JTF commander deployed an eight-person liaison team to the ECOWAS headquarters in Accra, Ghana. This planner-heavy liaison team provided crucial situational

awareness and played a significant role in enabling the deployment of ECOMIL forces. The team also conducted a handover with senior representatives from special operations command-Europe, which had deployed forces in the event a noncombatant evacuation operation became necessary. At times, the liaison team in Accra served as a shadow staff, providing advice and counsel to the ECOWAS planning element. As part of the JTF liaison team, a logistics planner led a planning syndicate of ECOWAS staff officers, UN representatives, and contractors. This syndicate produced detailed plans and timelines for deploying ECOMIL forces and mechanisms to track progress and identify potential problems early.

### Execution of JTF Operations

The JTF conducted the operation in four phases. In Phase I, Assessment and Preparation, Army Special Forces teams deployed to eight ECOWAS countries to determine the readiness of forces slated for Liberia. The JTF began interagency coordination early and quickly established liaison teams at ECOWAS headquarters and the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia. In Phase II, Containment and Stabilization, the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) with the 26th MEU arrived off the coast of Liberia. The JTF established its forward headquarters aboard the USS *Iwo Jima*, established liaison teams with ECOMIL forces, and supported the deployment of the initial Vanguard battalion. In Phase III, Build Up to Mature Multinational Interim Force, the JTF facilitated the deployment of the second Vanguard battalion and the remaining ECOMIL forces and provided intelligence and logistics support to ECOMIL operations in and around Monrovia. In Phase IV, Transition and Redeployment, the JTF facilitated the transition of the operation from ECOMIL to UN control and then redeployed.

After the JTF officially stood up on 25 July, the JTF began moving forces into the joint operations area. The JTF commander and a small staff initially deployed to Accra to participate in discussions with the ECOWAS secretariat and military leaders. These meetings were key to the JTF commander's understanding of ECOMIL's concept for the deployment and the logistical challenges ECOMIL faced. Steaming from the U.S. Central Command area, the Iwo Jima ARG arrived off the coast of Liberia on 29 July.

On 4 August, the JTF commander and a 45-member staff completed deployment to establish a JTF forward headquarters aboard the *Iwo Jima*, located 20 nautical miles off the coast of Monrovia. The forward headquarters was small by design and

maximized use of SETAF's well-established reachback capability.

Throughout the 2-month deployment, the forward headquarters focused on current operations and intelligence, performing direct C2 of JTF forces operating in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Senegal. The forward headquarters also played a significant role in interagency coordination with the U.S. Embassy, Department of State, UN, and private humanitarian organizations operating in Liberia.

The JTF headquarters, located in the Longare JTF facility near Vienza, provided the bulk of planning coordination, and administrative and logistical functions. At a peak strength of over 350 personnel, it enabled the JTF to minimize the forward footprint without compromising mission effectiveness. SETAF's C2 facility featured advanced secure communications, state-of-the-art electronic connectivity and interactive planning tools.

During the course of operations, the JTF conducted daily operational updates with commanders at all nodes within the joint operations area. Using the Defense Collaborative Tool Suite, the JTF commander talked simultaneously to commanders and staff in Accra, Freetown, Dakar, Longare, and aboard the *Iwo Jima*. The staff briefed the JTF commander via video teleconference (VTC) twice a day on operational issues, and the J5 briefed him daily on future plans. The JTF commander also made frequent use of desktop VTCs for periodic updates with EUCOM and U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) leaders and staff.

With the forward headquarters established in the joint operations area, and ECOMIL forces preparing to enter Liberia, further execution of the JTF plan required robust information operations. At the operational and tactical levels, the IO plan involved a concerted effort to manage expectations. The JTF commander played a prominent role in influencing senior U.S. and UN officials. At this critical juncture, the JTF's IO themes emphasized ECOMIL's neutrality, U.S. forces' supporting role, and the need for all Liberians to support the peace process.

Making use of the ARG's on-board radio and print production facilities, the JTF built several written and radio products for direct communications with the Liberian people. The JTF broadcast messages directly from the ship and distributed leaflets in Monrovia. The JTF also deployed a small psychological operations (PSYOP) detachment to interface directly with the Liberian people and to develop selected programming for eventual airing on Monrovia radio stations.



U.S. Air Force

U.S. Ambassador John W. Blaney and Commanding General, Special Operations Command Europe, BG Mike Jones watch as UN and NGO staff members evacuate the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia, Liberia.

At noon on 11 August, Taylor resigned as the president of Liberia and went into exile in Nigeria, meeting a key precondition U.S. President George W. Bush had established for U.S. intervention. At 1300, to coincide with Taylor's departure from Monrovia, Liberians saw the ARG's ships move to within 3 miles of the coast of Monrovia—a powerful message sent to the warring factions that U.S. forces were now directly engaged.

With Taylor out of the country, the JTF sought to energize humanitarian organizations to resume relief operations in Monrovia. To do this, the JTF commander sent the JTF J7 Civil-Military Operations officer to meet with humanitarian officials aboard a UN motor vessel, the *Martin I*. As the C2 ship for UN humanitarian operations, the *Martin I* was essential to coordinating the arrival of additional humanitarian supplies. Still 30 miles out to sea, UN officials would not move into the Freeport area of Monrovia without JTF assurances that the situation was secure. The *Martin I* crew also wanted the UN security coordinator to declare the port to be at a level 4 security status, the minimum level the UN requires to conduct emergency relief operations.

The J7 improved the confidence of UN officials by briefing them on the JTF's role in opening the Freeport. As part of the JTF's effort to improve port access, the J7 toured the port on the morning of 14 August with the World Food Program's harbor master, pointing out potential obstacles to the unloading of relief supplies, which Navy SEALs and explosive ordnance disposal teams from the JTF had marked during an exhaustive hydrographic survey of the port and surrounding waterways. Over the

next few weeks, the J7 and humanitarian officials conducted several other joint endeavors to help bridge the perception gap between the JTF and humanitarian organizations suspicious of the depth of U.S. commitment.

The JTF also continued work to secure funding from DOD. The JTF staff judge advocate and comptroller, working through EUCOM, eventually helped

secure \$500,000 in funding under the auspices of the Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid organization. Over the next several weeks, this funding bought repair parts for materiel-handling equipment, generators, forklifts, and other items critical to getting the Freeport back into working order. The Department of State also procured additional money for critical equipment and supplies to posture ECOMIL for success as part of the follow-on UN mission.

On 14 August, in the major media event of the operation, JTF forces went ashore at both Roberts International Airport on the outskirts of Monrovia and at the Freeport. At 0800, the initially deployed Nigerian battalion began the precarious tactical movement from Roberts International Airport through positions held by Taylor loyalists to occupy recently vacated LURD positions on Bushrod Island. U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) AV-8 Harriers and AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters provided overwatching support. Before this move, the JTF established Marine liaison teams at ECOMIL headquarters and the command post of the Nigerian battalion to facilitate communication with the JTF Forward Headquarters on the *Two Jima*.

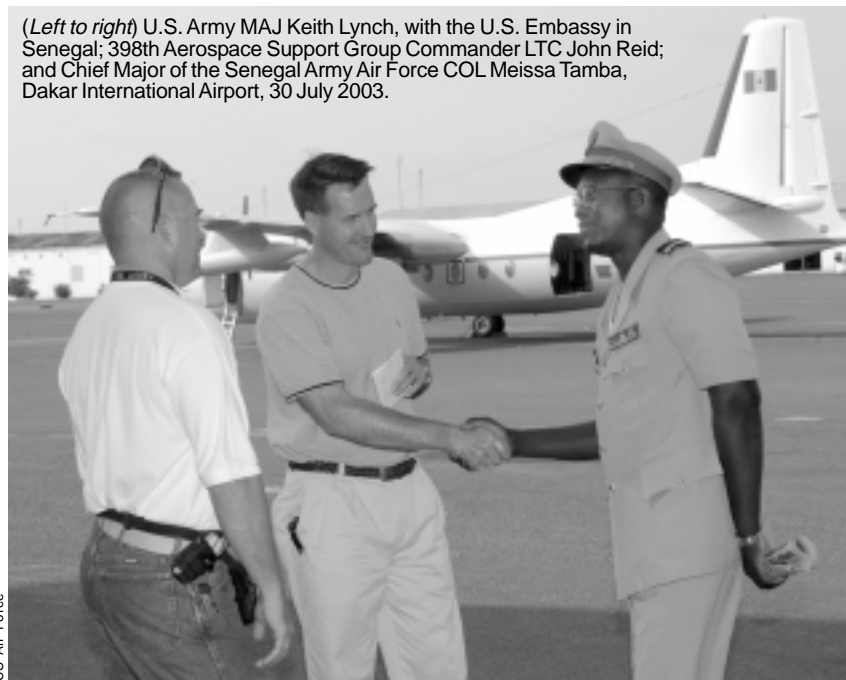
Shortly after ECOMIL forces began occupying positions in the Freeport, the 26th MEU flew 150 Marines by helicopter into Roberts International Airport to establish a QRF. For operational reasons and to support the JTF IO plan, putting the QRF ashore made sense. Although the initial JTF concept was to maintain the QRF afloat off the coast of Monrovia, a gap developed in the deployment timeline between the first and second Nigerian

Vanguard battalions that threatened to delay the opening of the Freeport, the center of gravity for resuming humanitarian operations. The initial JTF concept also mandated the availability of a highly visible and readily available QRF to support the exposed peacekeepers in downtown Monrovia. Beyond this concern, JTF intelligence determined that MODEL forces were eyeing Roberts International Airport as a potential objective. Positioning a U.S. QRF there would check MODEL, free up additional ECOMIL forces to secure the Freeport and Bushrod Island, and clearly demonstrate U.S. resolve.

Simultaneous with the QRF's move into Roberts International Airport, another 80 Marines were flown into the Freeport to conduct initial engineering work to secure the Freeport area. On 14 August, aircraft from the 26th MEU began conducting aerial patrols over Monrovia. Marine aircraft continued these patrols through late September, eventually flying well outside Monrovia to provide the JTF commander and ECOMIL with critical intelligence on rebel and government operations outside the city.

ECOMIL's rapid securing of the Freeport was a milestone in Liberia's road to recovery. The UN declared the port open to delivery of emergency humanitarian relief, and at 0800 on the 15th, the *Martin I*, loaded with food and fuel, docked at the port. On 18 August, representatives from the government of Liberia, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, and MODEL signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra. Although the agreement formally ended the Liberian civil war, it did not immediately bring peace to all of Liberia. Small-scale skirmishes in the countryside—well outside Monrovia—and media reports of thousands of civilians moving as a result of the fighting, led to continued calls for more peacekeepers. Indeed, as the humanitarian situation in Monrovia steadily improved, media reports of "humanitarian disasters" in the countryside led to growing pressure on Okonkwo to move his already stretched forces outside Monrovia.

(Left to right) U.S. Army MAJ Keith Lynch, with the U.S. Embassy in Senegal; 398th Aerospace Support Group Commander LTC John Reid; and Chief Major of the Senegal Army Air Force COL Meissa Tamba, Dakar International Airport, 30 July 2003.



US Air Force

Misinformation about the true state of the humanitarian situation complicated the JTF's mission. Numerous media stories, quoting humanitarian officials, reported a cholera "epidemic" in Monrovia and "thousands" of internally displaced persons overcrowding camps. To gain some clarity, the JTF commander dispatched teams to inspect selected areas. According to media reports, Samuel K. Doe Stadium in Monrovia housed 60,000 people who were living in squalid conditions. The JTF's on-the-ground assessment showed the stadium held no more than 15,000 people. While Liberians were clearly suffering, this example illustrated a tendency by some humanitarian organizations to overstate the severity of the humanitarian situation in Monrovia.

On 18 August, Bush announced that all U.S. forces would be out of Liberia by 1 October. For the first time, the JTF commander had firm guidance on when the U.S. mission should end. Having already defined end-state conditions, the JTF accelerated efforts to ensure ECOMIL was ready to transfer command of the mission to the UN on 1 October.

Okonkwo began steadily positioning more forces on Bushrod Island north of the Freeport. Based on ECOMIL's increasing numbers and its improving tactical situation, the JTF commander ordered the QRF to redeploy back to its ships on 24 August, which produced an outcry from humanitarian officials who believed this underscored a lack of U.S. commitment in Liberia. Nonetheless, the move made



Nigerian Army soldier mans a checkpoint on the road from Roberts International Airport to Monrovia.

tactical sense. With the disappearance of any real threat to Roberts International Airport, an afloat QRF was actually closer to the bulk of ECOMIL forces now positioned on Bushrod Island, 30 miles west of the airport.

By the third week of the deployment, humanitarian operations were well under way in Monrovia. Markets were open, people were moving freely, and a sense of normalcy had returned to the capital. However, with expanding operations, ECOMIL's logistical challenges began to expand. Disruptions in the deployment timeline and severe equipment shortages, especially of repair parts for armored personnel carriers, combined to threaten ECOMIL's plan to push north of Bushrod Island to LURD positions along the Po River. Realizing the gravity of the sustainment problems, the JTF coordinated for and deployed a JTF logistics planner to help the Department of State coordinate contracted logistics support.

Unaware of ECOMIL's growing logistical problems, humanitarian officials were more concerned about ECOMIL's ability to stop sporadic fighting in the countryside. With the 1 October deadline approaching, and with humanitarian organizations still calling for more U.S. involvement, the JTF commander frequently encountered humanitarian offi-

cials expressing a lack of confidence in ECOMIL. In private conversations with UN officials, the JTF commander spelled out what the relatively small ECOMIL force had achieved:

- Roberts International Airport and the Freeport had been secured for humanitarian organizations.

- UN and other humanitarian organizations were freely moving about Monrovia.

- Aid was beginning to move into the countryside.

- Bushrod Island, the area of the most intense fighting, had been effectively made a weapons-free zone.

The JTF commander emphasized that ECOMIL was a well-led force. In spite of numerous challenges, ECOMIL had succeeded in creating a safe, secure environment in Monrovia in which humanitarian organizations could resume operations. The specter of the bitter legacy of ECOMOG was dead.

By this time, many were unaware of the JTF and the ECOMIL forces' achievements. U.S. forces operated under a "passive" public affairs posture, the ECOWAS political leadership in Accra was silent, and ECOMIL was reluctant to tell the media about its successes in Monrovia. Consequently, JTF IO emphasized ECOMIL's performance. The JTF public affairs officer engaged media on ECOMIL's behalf and provided periodic operational updates.

JTF PSYOP developed a widely played radio program, "ECOMIL and You," and worked closely with the U.S. Embassy to secure funding to restart Monrovia stations that had closed during the civil war. Throughout these efforts, the JTF's messages emphasized that ECOMIL had succeeded in securing Monrovia, aid was now flowing, more ECOMIL forces were en route, and ECOMIL would soon expand its operations outside Monrovia. Armed with JTF-produced talking points, ECOMIL officials eventually began to engage media, but not before their detractors had beaten them to the press.

Despite its accomplishments in the capital city, the proof of ECOMIL's effectiveness was its ability to conduct operations outside of Monrovia. On 8 September, with 3,200 ECOMIL troops on the ground, Okonkwo sent 550 soldiers from Guinea-Bissau to the towns of Totota and Kakata, about 150 kilometers north of Monrovia. On 10 September, Okonkwo deployed another 250 troops north of MODEL positions near the port city of Buchanan, some 120 kilometers from Monrovia. The JTF provided aerial photography and intelligence analysis to support ECOMIL movements. MEU helicopters and U.S. Navy P-3s, supporting the 398th Air Expeditionary

## JTF Liberia Lessons Learned

**Mission Analysis.** Mission analysis is the most essential step of the military decisionmaking process (MDMP). If you get this step wrong, you will not be able to clearly define the mission or adequately plan the operation. Mission analysis also requires constant emphasis when conducting the deliberate MDMP. Once operations begin, you must stay focused on the letter of the mission and the commander's intent. Competing agendas can easily lead to mission creep.

**Standing Up and Manning the JTF.** A split-based joint task force (JTF) underscores the need for a standing joint force headquarters (JFHQ). A JFHQ at the operational/tactical level, or a standing JFHQ such as Joint Forces Command, enables the JTF commander and staff to focus on command functions forward while control functions are exported to the JFHQ. A standing JFHQ mitigates many of the problems the JTF encounters in filling the joint manning document. A need exists to incorporate

JTF joint manning documents into U.S. European Command (EUCOM) Directive 55-11, "Joint Task Force Headquarters, Policies, Procedures, and Organization."

**Multiple Stakeholder Agendas.** Multiple stakeholders must understand the agendas of other stakeholders, especially among humanitarian organizations who have a vested interest in U.S. forces assuming a greater role. Individual organizations and leaders should be treated as components of intelligence preparation of the battlefield, and their agendas and how they can change the mission focus should be understood.

**Reachback.** The reachback capability helped the JTF commander minimize America's footprint in Liberia without compromising mission effectiveness. Reachback requires secure, reliable, and redundant deployable communications. In split-based operations, the main staff for interagency and worldwide coordination should be used.

Group in Dakar, flew numerous missions to confirm or deny media reports of fighting and thousands of civilians on the move. Also on 10 September, the last ECOMIL contingent arrived in Liberia, bringing the total strength to 3,550 troops from 8 of the 15 ECOWAS member states. By mid-September, ECOMIL had clearly proven its worth during operations in Monrovia, Totota, Kakata, and Buchanan.

In addition to the improving humanitarian situation, the political front gained momentum. In mid-September, the UN Security Council passed a resolution authorizing the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). While this was good news for the future of Liberia, it did not put to rest a continuing debate about whether all ECOMIL forces would be "blue-hatted" as part of UNMIL. Eventually, ECOMIL's success on the ground and the JTF commander's persuasive arguments convinced UN officials to keep ECOMIL forces as part of the follow-on UN force.

During the last week of September, with the humanitarian disaster averted and UN advance headquarters established in Monrovia, the JTF made final preparations for the disengagement of U.S.

forces. On 26 September, the Iwo Jima ARG moved back over the horizon, no longer visible from Monrovia. By 30 September, the last of the three Marine liaison teams with ECOMIL forces redeployed to the ship. That afternoon, the JTF commander and the forward staff flew out of Liberia. The mission of JTF Liberia was accomplished.

### Demonstrated Success

The U.S. military mission in Liberia was an unqualified success. Coalition operations, competing agendas among numerous stakeholders, destroyed infrastructure, and an uncertain security environment illustrated the complexity of conducting SOSO in sub-Saharan Africa. Although the total number of U.S. troops on the ground in Liberia never rose above 320, their presence and that of a naval ARG sent a powerful message that helped achieve U.S. national military objectives. Further, the operation clearly demonstrated that a relatively small forward U.S. military presence, empowered by reachback technology and strong interagency coordination, could enable a locally provided regional force to achieve tremendous results. **MR**

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